

Message Text

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TAGS.EAIR, JA

SUBJ. OKINAWANS PRESS FOR REDUCED AIR TRAVEL FEES

1. SUMMARY. IN THE FIRST SUPRA-PARTISAN EFFORT SINCE REVERSION, ALL SIGNIFICANT OKINAWAN ORGANIZATIONS COVERING THE ENTIRE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE JOINING TOGETHER TO PRESS THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT FOR REDUCED AIR FARES, ELIMINATION OF AIRPORT USER TAXES AND FOR CONSTRUCTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. PROPONENTS CITE THIS PREFECTURE'S UNUSUAL DEPENDENCE ON AIR TRAVEL AND THE ABSENCE OF THE HEAVILY SUBSIDIZED NATIONAL RAILWAYS. THEY FEAR THAT THE THREATENED RISE IN AIR FARES WILL RETARD OKINAWA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH. END SUMMARY.

2. LAST WEEK AN UNUSUAL GROUP OF 22 OKINAWAN ORGANIZATIONS JOINTLY ENDORSED APPEALS TO THE GOJ REQUESTING A REDUCTION IN AIR FARES BETWEEN THE MAINLAND AND OKINAWA AND THE EARLY CONSTRUCTION

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OF AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT NAHA. THE RALLY AT WHICH THE RESOLUTIONS WERE ADOPTED DREW 1000 PARTICIPANTS IN A STEADY DOWNPOUR. THE ORGANIZATIONS BACKING THIS EFFORT SPANNED THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SPECTRUM, AND INCLUDED ALL OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, ALL THE KEY MANAGEMENT AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, FARM GROUPS, RETAIL ASSOCIATIONS AND TRAVEL ORGANIZATIONS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN OVER SIX YEARS, WHEN THE REVERSION ISSUED WAS LAID TO REST, THAT AN ISSUE HAS UNCLASSIFIED

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ATTRACTED SUCH BROADLY-BASED OKINAWAN SUPPORT.

3. FACED WITH INFORMATION THAT AIR TRAVEL RATES THROUGHOUT JAPAN WILL BE RAISED ACROSS THE BOARD AROUND OCTOBER1, THE OKINAWAN APPEAL REQUESTED NOT ONLY THE CANCELLATION OF THIS INCREASE FOR OKINAWA BUT A FURTHER REDUCTION IN THE DISCOUNT ON OKINAWA-MAINLAND FARES FROM

TEN PERCENT TO TWENTY FIVE PERCENT. IN ADDITION, THE APPEAL REQUESTED

ELIMINATION OF ALL TAXES ON AIRPORT USER CHARGES, PARKING FEES, AVIATION FUEL AND ON NAVIGATIONAL AID FEES, ETC. IN THE OKINAWANS' VIEW, THIS SPECIAL TREATMENT IS JUSTIFIED BECAUSE OKINAWA DOES NOT OBTAIN THE BENEFITS OF THE HEAVILY SUBSIDIZED JAPAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS.

WITH OKINAWA TURNING INCREASINGLY TO TOURISM AS ITS ECONOMIC SALVATION, THE AIR FARE ISSUE IS CRITICAL FOR THE PREFECTURE'S FUTURE. (ROUGHLY 85 PERCENT OF OKINAWA'S 1,500,000 VISITORS

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EXPECTED IN 1978 WILL TRAVEL BY AIR).

4. THE OKINAWAN ORGANIZATIONS ALSO ENDORSED AN APPEAL TO CREATE AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AT NAHA TO SERVE AS JAPAN'S "GATEWAY TO THE SOUTH". THE NEW AIRPORT WOULD BE BUILT ON RECLAIMED LAND ADJACENT TO THE PRESENT AIRPORT AND, ACCORDING TO PRESENT PLANS, HAVE TWO 4000 METER RUNWAYS. AMONG JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SUCH AN EXPANDED AIRPORT IS THE DESIRE NOT TO SHARE FACILITIES WITH THE JASDF, WHICH ALSO USES NAHA AIRPORT.

5. COMMENT. THE POSSIBLE ELIMINATION OF THE VARIOUS TAXES INVOLVED IN THE USE OF NAHA AIRPORT WOULD BE OF CONSIDERABLE INTEREST TO US AIRLINES SERVING NAHA.

STRAUS

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